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# Political Factbook & WHO'S WHO IN NIGERIA

Mobolade Omonijo

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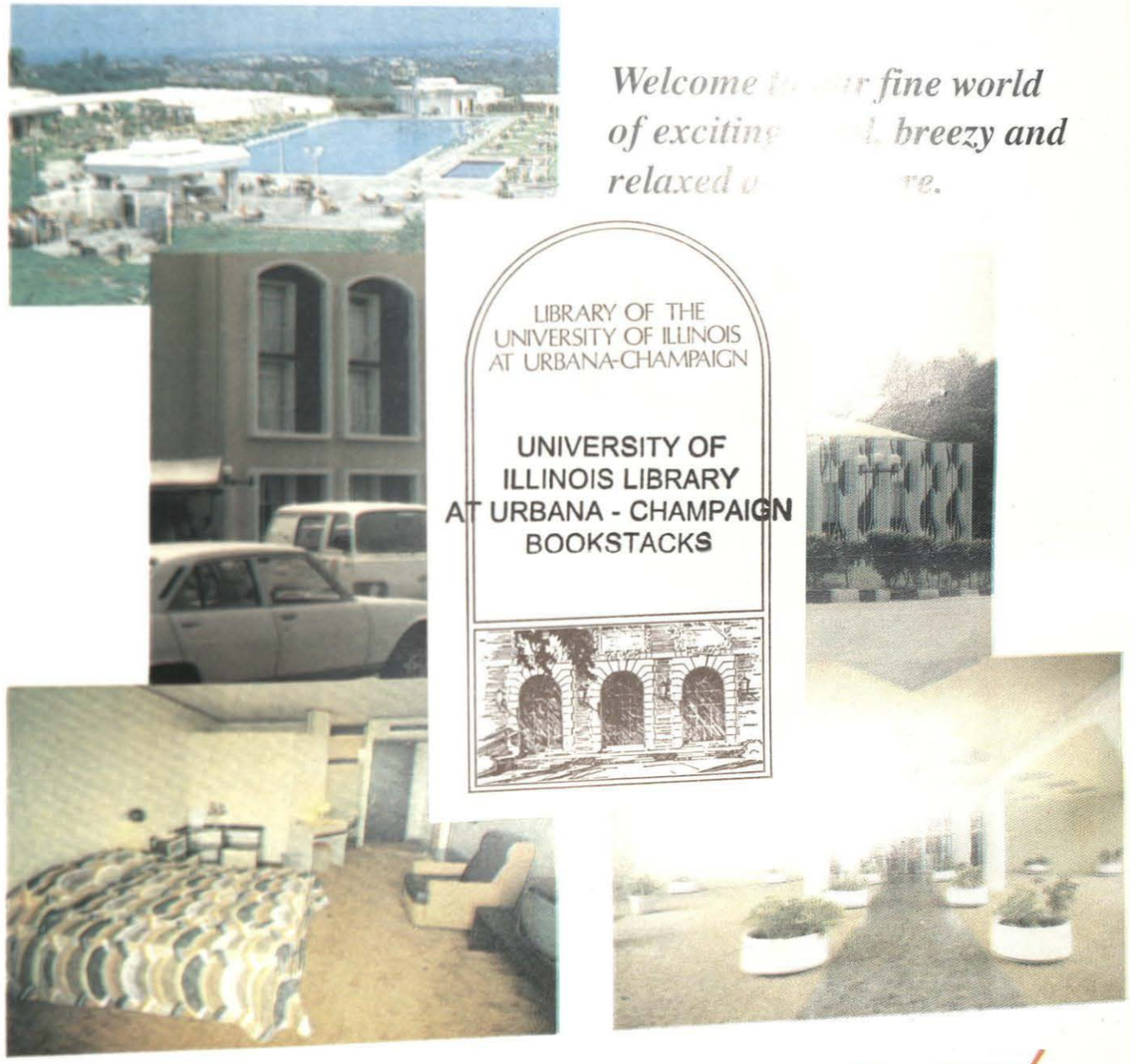

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# POLITICAL FACTBOOK

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# WHO'S WHO IN NIGERIA

**Mobolade Omonijo**

**WINNGAM Communications Limited**

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to the ideals for which the late Chief Bode Thomas lived and died. He was indeed, a matyr of the struggle for Nigerian freedom. He died early that others may live meaningfully.

## Tribute to the late Chief Bode Thomas (1921 - 1953)

Bode Thomas and his wife

It is a sad irony of the Nigerian political history that while little is known of Chief Bode Thomas, one of the most accomplished lawyers and politicians ever produced by the country, those who could, at best, be described as mediocres have continued to ride the crest of public acclaim. The late Chief Bode Thomas appeared to be a man in a hurry. He was born in 1921 and, at 21, was called to the Bar on September 20, 1942. At that time, it was a record. Within five years, Chief Bode Thomas was already one of the leading lawyers of his time. His sprawling chambers in Lagos was a talk of the town and many of the legal greats feared to cross swords with him.

The greatness of Chief Bode Thomas may be better appreciated when it is considered that he was actually senior at the Bar to such acknowledged giants like G.B.A Coker, Udo Udoma, Obafemi Awolowo, Lionet Brett, H.O. Davies, F.R.A. Williams and Remi Fani-Kayode. In fact, in 1950, he went into partnership with Chiefs Rotimi Williams and Remi Fani-Kayode to establish the firm of Messrs Thomas, Williams and Kayode, located at Jankara Lagos. The chamber was so feared that the juniors quickly branded their brand of advocacy, ***Jankara***, by which it was meant that their knowledge and use of legal technicalities was unsurpassed.

Despite his achievements on the legal plane at a very young age, Chief Bode Thomas realised very early that the greatest good of the greatest number could only be pursued on the political plane. As soon as he returned to Nigeria as a brand new lawyer in 1942, therefore, he teamed up with men of like minds in the Nigerian Youth Movement. As in other theatres of life, he quickly mastered the ropes and, by 1947, he was already propounding political theories. No less a personality than Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe has credited to him the theory of greater devolution of power to the regions. In his ***Development*** of ***Nigerian Political Parties***, Dr. Azikiwe said Bode Thomas was the first systematic exponent of a theory of regionalised parties "to deal exclusively with matters affecting their respective regiones. These bodies may join at the top and form a council for Nigeria which will be competent to tackle any matter that may affect the country generally." Zik who was then a firm believer in unitarism later converted to federalism when it became clear that the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria would tolerate no less.

Chief Bode Thomas was also a leading member of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* and, by the time the political establishment in the West founded the Action Group in 1951, he was unanimously elected the first general secretary while Chief Obafemi Awolowo was, of course the prime mover and national president. The two complemented each other very well. Chief Awolowo was a hard worker, intellectually deep and a thorough administrator, while Chief Bode Thomas was also hard working very intelligent, quick witted and not known to suffer fools gladly. Both shared the same political philosophy and, above all, Chief Bode Thomas was fiercely loyal to his leader.

In 1951, when Nigerians were first appointed into the Central Council of Ministers under the John Macpherson constitution, Chief Bode Thomas was the leader of a three man team seconded to the council by the Western Region. Others, Chiefs S.L.A. Akintola and Arthur Prest naturally deferred to him. In no time, the formidable team from the West, complemented by Sir Adesoji Aderemi, began to set standards which others found too high. When Chief Anthony Enahoro moved the historic motion for independence in 1953, Chief Bode Thomas, the central minister for Transport, was on hand to offer his support to the decision to overthrow the colonial yoke within three years.

As deputy leader of the AG at the tender age of 32, Chief Bode Thomas was at his best in elevating adherence to principles above political opportunism. He, contrary to expectations that he would at least be silent while the issue was being debated in parliament, made a very significant contribution. He said:

> "We do not think it is necessary for us any longer to stay and work with people whose intentions are to be guided by those who have vested interests in the prolongation of British rule..."

He promptly resigned from the Council of Ministers thereby forcing an early collapse of the Macpherson Constitution.

Chief Bode Thomas's life did not revolve round the practice of law and politics only. He also believed in the traditional system. Perhaps to prove the point that he had an identifiable root, he was installed the Balogun of Oyo in 1949. The Balogun being a highly regarded war title in Yorubaland was considered particularly suitable for a politician of Chief Bode Thomas's stature and temperament. When he found the traditional institution as then constituted unsuitable for the task of national development, he wasted no time in spearheading a reform of the Oyo traditional institution thus incurring the wrath of Oba Adeniran Adeyemi II who was then the Alaafin of Oyo.

The curtains were drawn on the life of Chief Bode Thomas on November 20, 1953 in circumstances still regarded as mysterious today. Long after his death, keen students of Nigerian politics must remember that the labour of this hero of the national struggle for independence and meaningful development must not be in vain.

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My gratitude to my dear wife, Ayobami and children - Adeoluwa, Adedotun and Atinuke know no bounds. They provided the congenial atmosphere to make the writing and production smooth. Even when the children's games room had to be converted into a temporary study with attendant inconveniences to home arrangement, their mother ensured that there was no whimper of protest. Their patience and cooperation is the type that legends are made of.

While thanking them all, it is perhaps necessary to point out that in this lifelong dedication to writing and publishing there is no end in sight to the demand for such support, cooperation and understanding.

- Third and fourth quarter, 1992 - presidential election.
- Fourth quarter, 1992 - Swearing in of President and final disengagement.
- Third quarter, 1998 - Presidential Election.
- Third quarter, 1998 - Swearing in of new President and final disengagement.

*The similarity is so striking that there is little need for further commen*

**Comment**

The less said about the Abacha transition the better. His years in powers could be likened to the darkness of a moonless night. It was a period when military officers were seen as brigands in power. The transition plan itself was not designed to succeed. Indeed, before General Abacha died on June 8, 1998, he had already been adopted as the presidential candidate of the five registered political parties.

**The Abubakar Plan**

Details of items on the Abubakar transition plan have been laid out in Part

One of this book. Suffice it to say here that the programme has been successfully brought to an end. But, does this amount to democratisation of the polity? As seen with the Murtala/Obasanjo programme, a hand over to civilians may not necessarily amount to the installation of a stable, democratic polity. The task of democratisation would have to be carried out by the politicians collectively through the political parties. There is now a dire need to revisit the recommendation of regular meeting of politicians of all hues to review the polity and plot the way forward.



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## APPENDIX I

# MOTION FOR INDEPENDENCE MOVED BY ALHAJI (SIR) ABUBAKAR TAFAWA BALEWA ON JANUARY 16, 1960

Resolutions on Nigerian Independence have been debated more than once in this House. On those occasions speeches were made referring to the historical background of the events which have culminated in the resolution which it is my privilege to move today. The history of Nigeria's connections with the United Kingdom is well known and shall not forget the hard work put in by British officers and those officers who came from the other West African Territories, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia, and from the West Indies. All those officers contributed their share to the development of Nigeria and deserve our thanks for enabling us to have advanced so far. We thank not only those who are serving Nigeria today but also those who are now retired and we shall always remember the selfless service given by those hundreds of officers who are now dead.

It is not my intention in a debate of this kind to repeat the history of Nigeria which I know to have been so well covered by several writers in various text-books. My task in moving this resolution is to draw the attention of the house to certain important matters which are likely to affect Nigeria as an independent country.

Now there are two questions which we must ask ourselves before we can be quite certain that we are properly aware of the implications of this Independence Motion. Firstly. what is the meaning of the term independent sovereign state. Independence is very different from self-government it is far wider in its scope. It is quite possible for a country to be self-governing without being independent although of course no country can be independent without being self-governing. Here in Nigeria we already have three self-governing regions, but they are not independent. In discussing this question of independence, people often describe our aim as the wish to exchange the place of a servant for that of son. That is not the whole truth: we are in fact asking to become as a son who has left his father's compound and has now to make his own way in the world.

In moving this Motion today I am asking you to take an irretrievable step. There can be no going back to a dependent status and I feel that I must place on record the fact that I am asking you to take this step with full consciousness of all that it entails.

I sound this note of warning because of what I am about to say. The last two subjects which will be handed over to Nigeria's sole control are defence and external affairs. Both of these subjects are vitally important and our assumption of responsibility for them is the full measure of our independence. To deal with defence first - you may say that Nigeria is a peaceful country which has no territorial ambitions and no intention of attacking her neighbours. I agree.

You may also say that there is no evidence that we are going to be attacked. Superficially I should say that view is correct but I must tell the House frankly that in my opinion we are confronted by a very serious situation. Over the past year or so there has been a good deal of trouble going on in some of the